

Aiken Standard: Wilson talks jobs, safety

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The United States is safer than it was on Sept. 11, 2001, but still isn't as safe as it should be, U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., said Wednesday.

During a visit to the Aiken Standard, the 2nd District congressman described a Christmas Day incident as a "gruesome failure." In that situation, passengers aboard an airliner approaching Detroit subdued a fellow passenger from Nigeria, whose bomb mechanism strapped to his body had failed to detonate.

Given that the man was coming from destabilized Yemen, "there should be have been a full-body search," Wilson said. "This was a case where the father had actually reported his son."

Despite such concerns, the congressman is optimistic about progress in Afghanistan and Iraq. Afghanistan has 6,500 schools, and Wilson contends 85 percent of the people have access to health care. He was surprised to learn that Iraq has seen a 95 percent reduction in violence.

"We're not creating perfect societies," Wilson said. "But if we can reduce violence, we can create a civil society. Our troops should be given credit, as they've distributed 2 million backpacks so that girls can go to school in Iraq."

Closer to home in South Carolina, Wilson acknowledged that Republicans must share the blame for the long-term unemployment rate in the state. Ironically, he said, South Carolina is a leading manufacturing state, but the economic decline has led to the loss of a huge number of those jobs.

But the state has demonstrated it can compete through such collaborative efforts in landing the upcoming Boeing plant. Wilson cited his own supportive role in expanding the Dixie-Narco plant in Williston and economic development efforts in Allendale. He supports GE Turbines and sees great potential for wind energy and nuclear energy.

"What has been so successful in the past," Wilson said, "is that technical schools are getting people trained and

educated for the 21st century."

While the state has not treated education well overall, "it's not all dollars," he said. "We need to be creative. I want local boards to be running the schools and not have the federal government running them any more than they are now."

The S.C. General Assembly approved a property tax reform measure in 2006 that took most of the taxing authority away from school districts that had it. Wilson didn't respond to questions about that legislation, but did agree the funding inequities are a big problem.

Wilson made national headlines last summer when he yelled, "You lie" to President Barack Obama during the president's address to Congress about health care reform. The statement was not premeditated and he apologized to the president by telephone after the speech. Since then, Wilson estimates he has received 100,000 letters and held town meetings and given speeches. The response has been overwhelmingly supportive and positive, but Wilson wouldn't say whether those responding directly supported his outburst to the president.

"They want me to talk about the issues," he said. "We're got important issues before the country."

Wilson continues to oppose the health care bill, especially the government option. He maintains that America's health care system is the best in the world and provides faster assistance than people get in Canada and England, which have universal health care. The Republicans in Congress have their own plan that would address reform without overwhelming the system, Wilson said.

Earlier this week, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., was censured by the Lexington County Republican Party for his stance on immigration and federal bailouts. Wilson called that party action unfortunate.

"I have a lot of respect for Graham," Wilson said. "There's no doubt he's a committed conservative and a pioneer. He's an independent guy and I respect that."

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